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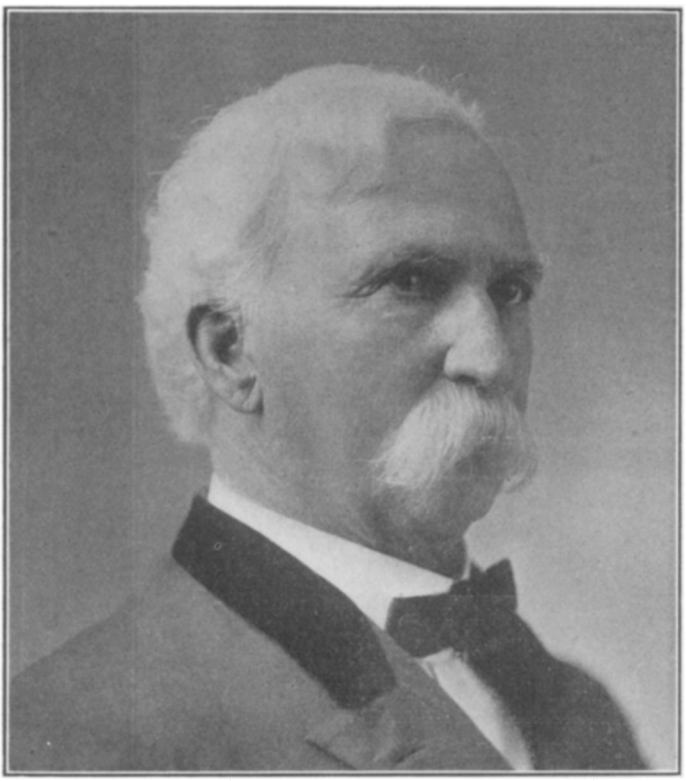

CAPT. WILLIAM T. CRAWFORD

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Early Normal Schools

ASCENSION SEMINARY AND CAPTAIN WILLIAM T. CRAWFORD

By JOHN C. CHANEY of Sullivan, Indiana

In 1858 William T. Crawford of Lisbon, Ohio, a graduate of Lisbon High School, fresh from his matriculation at Mount Union college, Ohio, came to Farmersburg, Sullivan county, Indiana, to visit relatives who had but recently immigrated to Jackson township—on a vacation and exploring trip. He farmed a crop of corn about two miles north of Hymera during the summer of that year.

While thus engaged he noted the lack of education and interest in education among the people with whom he came in contact. When the few schools in the neighborhoods in the fall assembled, he also noted the crudity of methods pursued by the teachers of these schools.

The next spring at the close of the short terms of school which then prevailed, he opened a select subscription school in a private residence in Farmersburg in which there was a spare front room about twenty feet square. In this select school there were gathered together from surrounding country schools and in the village of Farmersburg twenty-seven young people—about equally divided between males and females. This school continued for eleven weeks and adjourned to meet again September 15th following. On assembling in September there were thirty-two enrolled. The school awakened the people to education; and the fame of the teacher spread for

many miles. There was at the time a newspaper published at Sullivan, county seat of Sullivan county, whose editor interested himself in the educational demands of western Indiana. The editor visited the Farmersburg school, which visit resulted in an editorial in the newspaper, recommending all teachers of Sullivan county, "Before beginning their work for the school year, or if any of them had already begun, to close their schools for a week, and attend the Crawford school at Farmersburg."

This the teachers generally did; and then and there was held an "institute week" in connection with daily recitations in this select school.

It was yet early enough in the fall for the most of the institute sessions to be held under a spreading oak tree standing on what afterward became Ascension Seminary grounds. The then acting county "school examiner" attended the institute and lent it his co-operation and support.

It all resulted in a popular demand for a select school which would not only impart instruction, but "train teachers how to teach."

In 1860, from his own purse, Mr. Crawford, then but 22 years old, purchased a small field lying at the western edge of the village of Farmersburg as a "school grounds," and returned to his home in Ohio, where he married Elizabeth Conkle, a school mate of his in Mount Union college.

He raised a flock of sheep and taught a three months term of school in Ohio. He disposed of the sheep, gathered together what money he could, and took his wife with him to Farmersburg to build a school building and found a Normal school. Upon landing at Farmersburg he found many enthusiastic friends in support of his enterprise, and he proceeded to the erection of a two-story frame building 36 by 60 feet. Meantime, the Civil war had begun, and the call for volunteers to save the Union had gone forth. The young professor heard the call and answered it by raising Company H of the 85th Indiana infantry, and soon went to the front, where, as captain of his company, he served "full three long years of warfare." His command distinguished itself in many of the hard-fought battles of the rebellion.

While in the service his seminary building stood weatherboarded and roofed but not plastered. The army was no place for a fighting soldier to make money, and money was needed to complete the building.

He and his company were discharged soon after the surrender of Lee, and he came home and applied himself, under limited means, to his school prospects with assiduity, and so far completed the seminary building as to open school in it in the fall of 1865.

The post office at Farmersburg was named Ascension, and this name he gave to his seminary. Ascension Seminary became a worthy normal school in western Indiana, and was the inspiration for the State Normal school at Terre Haute.

Before describing this honored school, a brief description of its founder, Professor William T. Crawford, may be appropriate. He was born in Jay county, Indiana, in 1837; his parents, Samuel and Gracy Crawford, of Scotch-Irish stock, residing in Indiana about two years. He was reared in Columbiana county, Ohio, however, within six miles of Lisbon, the seat of government of the county. He was the sixth of a family of ten children, six of whom were teachers. He was a man of striking personality, stood five feet eleven inches in his stockings. His limbs were slender but well shaped and muscular. His eyes were gray, his hair a tawny-black, and he had a clear complexion. An aquiline nose and a fine face completes his physical description. He wore a mustache and shaved his whiskers, dressed in Prince Albert coat and plug hat and looked the cultured gentleman.

In action he was dynamic, and his resolution of purpose made him the personification of energy. He inspired his pupils; and every teacher who emanated from Ascension seminary possessed his characteristics, imitated his methods and manners, and, like himself, succeeded.

It is noted above that his hair was black. However, he came of an ancestry which grew gray early in life, and this inheritance, together with a spell of typhoid fever in the army, made his hair white, while his mustache remained black, at the time he founded Ascension seminary. His picture represents him at 70 years of age, taken several years after he had retired from school work.

Ascension seminary continued at Farmersburg until 1872, when, because of inadequate equipment, it was by arrangement with the school trustees of Sullivan moved to Sullivan, occupying the second and third stories of the recently completed Central school building, where it continued to 1878, when Professor Crawford retired and the seminary became merged with the high school of Sullivan. The public schools of Sullivan being united under one roof with the seminary, Professor Crawford conducted both.

With Professor Crawford there were associated, as assistant teachers, at Farmersburg, Charles W. Finney, an army comrade; John T. Hays, a graduate of Mount Union college, Ohio, and A. P. Allen, a graduate of Depauw (Asbury) university. At Sullivan were Professor Crawford, John T. Hays, A. P. Allen, W. H. Cain and Amanda DeBaun, with several grade teachers and assistants.

In connection with the regular school work there was a music department, under direction of Professor and Mrs. Beazle; and also a literary society where expression was taught in declamation, composition and debate, with a professor as critic. For expression development the school was divided into three grand divisions, each of which was subdivided into three classes which came on duty every three weeks successively.

To economize the time for study and recitation, the literary society met every Friday night of the school year. The school year had three school terms of three months each. The curriculum of the school embraced everything now covered in the eighth grade of the public school and went thence beyond the present high school course of the public school system, taking the range of two years of the present college course of study. It embraced philosophy, physiology and hygiene, grammar, English, history, ancient and modern, logic and mental philosophy. In mathematics it embraced integral calculus, algebra to the nth degree, geometry and trigonometry.

The school taught Latin, Greek and German beside the English language. There was no observatory; and the students studied the stars in pairs. Professor Crawford taught German and mathematics; Professors Hays and Allen taught Latin and English, and Professor Cain taught Greek. They

all taught elocution. Oratory was also a specialty of the school. Professor Crawford was himself an orator.

A feature of the school was mental arithmetic, which consisted in solving a problem by oral analysis without the aid of the blackboard in stating and solving the same.

There were seven graduating classes which passed from Ascension seminary. There were two thousand three hundred and seventy-eight teachers who sprang from this institution, and there were many who entered the various professions and avocations who did not complete the courses of study and therefore did not graduate from the school. Judges, statesmen and diplomats were of this school and good citizenship abounded among them. It may well be said to be and to have been an inspirational school of the normal type; and, in its day, served the state and nation.

The training received at Ascension seminary was practical and useful in every calling. Physicians, ministers, lawyers, as well as those who followed gainful avocations, who received their training in this worthy institution attest its merit. It was, however, essentally a teachers' school; and its teachers were everywhere and by everybody desired.

Captain William T. Crawford reared a family of six children, four girls and two boys. He lived out his days at Sullivan, Indiana, in comfort, if not in plenty, and died in 1912, and throughout his career was a true patriot, a good citizen and a great "Normal Educator."

Captain Crawford for many years was prominent in Grand Army circles—attended and addressed Grand Army reunions and campfires in Indiana, Illinois and Ohio. For several years his comrades depended upon him to "get their pensions."

He belonged to the Presbyterian church, was Sunday school superintendent, and a deacon in the church. He was a republican in politics, yet he never held public office. He belonged also to the Masonic fraternity.

He was generally known and greeted as Professor Crawford throughout his life; and his name and fame were conspicuous as the founder of Ascension seminary, whence came the teachers whose services commanded the attention of the people of western Indiana and eastern Illinois for fifty years.